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How Do Face Consciousness and Public Self-Consciousness Affect Consumer Decision-Making?

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Abstract: Many individual differences affect consumers in the decision-making process (i.e., what to purchase; when to purchase). Face consciousness and public self-consciousness affect when in the fashion life cycle consumers decide to purchase, as well as what to purchase. Both face consciousness and public self-consciousness are concerned with consciousness (i.e., awareness; mindfulness) and both depend on social comparison processes. But the motivation underlying the social comparisons is different: with face consciousness, social comparisons yield appraisals of prestige and social status; with public self-consciousness, social comparisons yield assessments of situational appropriateness. The purpose of this study was to examine links among face consciousness; public self-consciousness; brand prestige; self-expressive brand (inner; social), and fashion leadership. Participants were 221 university students who completed a questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha reliability, and multivariate/univariate analysis of variance (M/ANOVA) were conducted to analyze data. Results showed that face consciousness and public self-consciousness similarly affected ratings of the social self-expressive brand. However, face consciousness (but not public self-consciousness) influenced ratings of brand prestige and inner self-expressive brand. Public self-consciousness (but not face consciousness) influenced fashion leadership. Thus, while face consciousness and public self-consciousness are both concerned with consciousness, they independently influence consumer decision-making in different ways. Theoretical and practical implications are provided.

Keywords: face consciousness; public self-consciousness; brand prestige; expressive to brands; fashion leadership

1. Introduction

Researchers have long been interested in factors that influence consumer decision-making. There are many individual differences (e.g., attitudes, personality, values, motivations; [1] that affect consumers in the decision-making process (i.e., what to purchase, when to purchase). Both external motivations (e.g., product variables such as price, quality, brand; [2]) and internal motivations (e.g., face consciousness, public self-consciousness) have been found to influence consumer decision-making (e.g., purchasing luxury brands). For example, face consciousness and public self-consciousness affect when in the fashion life cycle consumers decide to purchase (e.g., fashion leadership) as well as what to purchase (e.g., prestigious brands, brands that express the inner and/or social self). Although both face consciousness and public self-consciousness are concerned with consciousness (i.e., awareness, mindfulness), do they influence consumer decision-making in the same way?

Face consciousness refers to the desire to manage oneself and express oneself favorably to others in social encounters [3]. People who value face are keenly aware of their reputation and their high or low social status [4]. Consumers with high face consciousness have heightened concern for appearance, engage in activities to boost or maintain face [5], value status consumption [6], purchase prestigious

brand name products as symbols of their own prestige [7], and express their social identity by wearing branded products [5]. Public self-consciousness emphasizes an awareness and concern for the self as a social object [8]. Publicly self-conscious consumers are concerned about others' impressions of their physical appearance including their clothing. Fashion goods, because of their symbolic nature, are among the most often purchased products for public consumption presumably because of their visibility and ability to communicate personal traits. Individuals high in public self-consciousness are sensitive to the kind of image expected in social situations and use fashion products (e.g., brands) to create and present this image.

Both face consciousness and public self-consciousness depend on social comparison processes. But the motivation underlying the social comparisons is different: with face consciousness, social comparisons yield appraisals of prestige and social status; with public self-consciousness, social comparisons yield assessments of situational appropriateness. Understanding how these differences influence consumer decision-making may yield insights into the success or failure of fashion products. However, to the authors' knowledge, no research has explored differences between face consciousness and public self-consciousness as influences on consumer behavior regarding variables such as brand prestige, self-expressive brand (inner, social), and fashion leadership. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine links among face consciousness, public self-consciousness, and the following variables: brand prestige, self-expressive brand (inner, social), and fashion leadership.

2. Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework of this study includes the concepts of face consciousness, public self-consciousness, brand prestige, self-expressive brand (inner, social), and fashion leadership. Public self-consciousness theory [8] and social comparison theory [9] were used to explain consumers' attitudes and behavior (i.e., brand prestige, inner and social self-expressive brand, and fashion leadership). Face consciousness refers to an individual's desire to gain, maintain, and avoid losing face in relation to significant others in social contexts [10]. Public self-consciousness refers to an awareness of the self as it is viewed by others [8]. Both face consciousness and public self-consciousness depend on social comparison (i.e., comparison with others helps individuals to make sense of themselves) [9].

2.1. Public Self-Consciousness Theory

Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss [8] identified two separate aspects of self-consciousness: private and public. Private self-consciousness deals with internal self-awareness and public self-consciousness emphasizes awareness and concern for the self as a social object. According to Fenigstein et al. [8], research has shown that there are individual differences in consumers regarding the extent to which they compare themselves to others. Individuals high in public self-consciousness are likely to be aware of cues that signify social standards. Subsequently, during social interaction, individuals high in public self-consciousness attempt to present themselves in a way (i.e., conform to social standards) that results in others' approval. Therefore, compared with individuals who are low in public self-consciousness, individuals high in public self-consciousness are likely to be more skilled in impression management, such as, selecting appropriate attire for different social situations. Impression management is a process that depends on the awareness of social cues and the social benefits that derive from impression management (e.g., approval, assistance, friendship, power [11]).

2.2. Social Comparison Theory

Festinger's social comparison theory proposes that individuals look for similarities and dissimilarities to other people in order to evaluate their own opinions, abilities, and appearance [9]. Festinger asserted that individuals can use objective standards as a guide to accurately evaluate themselves. However, objective standards are not always available, so individuals compare themselves with others. According to Festinger, comparisons transpire under conditions of uncertainty (e.g., "Is my attire appropriate?"). Festinger's theory highlighted self-evaluation as a motive shown in individuals'

preference for upward comparison. Another motive for social comparison is self-enhancement resulting in downward comparisons (e.g., someone who is less attractive or lower social status) because they yield more favorable results than upward comparisons (but are less informative). Upward comparisons, relative to downward comparisons, lead to less favorable evaluations. People compare and are affected by comparisons because attributes such as status, success, and appropriateness are relative to others' status, success, and appropriateness. Social comparison may involve similar or dissimilar individuals, but similar individuals (e.g., in age, sex, social status) provide a more accurate evaluation of specific attributes than dissimilar individuals [9].

Chae [12] found that individuals who posted selfies on social media engaged in social comparison with friends and social media influencers/celebrities. As a result, they engaged in selfie-editing not because they were dissatisfied with their appearance, but because they desired a more ideal self-presentation on social media. According to Chae [13], social comparison theory best explains the process by which both frequency and interest in makeup tutorials on YouTube influence young women to adopt the postfeminist view of femininity as a bodily property and encourages enhancement of appearance through consumption. Women who compared themselves to an ideal female body type (upward social comparison with fitness images on Pinterest) expressed greater intentions to engage in extreme weight-loss behaviors [14]. Young adult females' luxury brand consciousness was significantly related to social comparison with significant others; they tended to conform with the views of significant others regarding the consumption of luxury brands [15]. Via social media, influencers (i.e., online celebrities) display their personal (sometimes luxurious) lives to followers—a life to which ordinary women can only aspire [16]. Frequency of comparison to influencers and public self-consciousness affected followers' envy of influencers through upward social comparison. Comparison with other people influences an individual's perception of and concern about their own attributes (e.g., selection of appropriate attire). Thus, social comparison theory can contribute to a greater understanding of how face consciousness and public self-consciousness operate as motivators for consumer decision-making.

3. Review of Literature

3.1. Face Consciousness

Face consciousness as a variable influencing consumer decision-making has attracted little research attention [17]. Face consciousness refers to an individual's desire to gain, maintain, and avoid losing face in relation to meaningful others in social contexts [10]. Face reflects favorable social self-esteem and the goal to be respected [18]. Face consciousness affects consumer behavior because it leads to the use of consumer products as a means to communicate a preferred image of the self to others. Consumers high in face consciousness may be particularly adept at choosing consumer products for their symbolic value; that is, their usefulness in communicating messages of high status and prestige. Those with high face consciousness attribute more value to extrinsic attributes (e.g., brand) than intrinsic attributes (e.g., quality) because extrinsic attributes display social status and self-image to the public [6]. Consumers with high face consciousness are willing to pay more for brand name products [19] and are more brand conscious [4,10]. Jiang [20] found that consumers with high face consciousness desired to have even greater face; consumers who desired greater face, spent more on consumer goods. According to Jiang [20], face consumption is a motivational process used to enhance, maintain or save face, through the conspicuous consumption of consumer products. Face products have distinctiveness (e.g., brand prestige or high price); their consumption garners social and public visibility. Jiang and Shan [4] investigated if consumers' face and brand consciousness influence their willingness to purchase luxury counterfeits rather than shanzhai products. Shanzhai products are inexpensively priced, but unlike counterfeit goods, innovative features have been added. Furthermore, shanzhai products are usually sold under a different brand name than the original, and therefore, under trademark laws are not considered illegal [21]. As a result, consumers with higher face conscious

are more likely to buy luxury counterfeits than shanzhai products. Presumably, consumers' face consciousness stimulates intense interest in famous brands, which leads to a more favorable perception of luxury counterfeit goods than shanzhai products. Socially visible possessions, such as luxury products and expensive cars, are status symbols that can help the owner gain face. Consumer choice of electric vehicles in China was positively influenced by face consciousness [22,23]. Brand prominence is "the extent to which a product has visible markings that help ensure observers recognize the brand" [24]. A product with high brand prominence is conspicuous, opulent, and logo-oriented; a product with low brand prominence is unobtrusive, discreet, and minimalistic [25]. Han et al. [24] found that consumers who aspired to social approval preferred an unobtrusive brand logo because it enhanced their self-image. The concept of face consciousness implies the need for social approval. Face is a multi-dimensional variable (e.g., gaining face, maintaining or saving face, fear of losing face) which affects many aspects of consumer behavior [26,27]. It is reasonable to assume that face consciousness motivates consumers as they make decisions about fashion products with face foremost in their minds.

3.2. Public Self-Consciousness

Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss [8] proposed that individuals have different dispositional tendencies toward self-awareness which they conceptualized as self-consciousness. Individuals who are high in public self-consciousness focus on the self as a social object; that is, they are concerned about how they present themselves and about how others perceive them [8]. Publicly self-conscious people are concerned with others' impressions, therefore they try to create a favorable public image and gain approval from others using self-presentation strategies [28–30]. Publicly self-conscious consumers are concerned about others' impressions, their physical appearance, fashion, interpersonal rejection, and loss of face [31].

There is a gap in research that examines public self-consciousness with regard to fashion consumption. Fashion goods, because of their symbolic nature, are among the most often purchased products for public consumption, presumably because of their visibility and ability to communicate personal traits. Individuals high in public self-consciousness are sensitive to the kind of image expected in social situations and use fashion products (e.g., brands) to create and present this image. Public self-consciousness has positively influenced intentions to purchase original vs. counterfeit goods [32,33]. Self-image positively affected purchase intentions of original products [34]. Consumers high in public self-consciousness select and use products in order to impress others. Public self-consciousness is positively correlated with self-appearance concern [35], fashion involvement [36,37] and fashion leadership [38]. One social benefit of luxury goods (i.e., prestige goods) is their message that the owner is successful, a member of an elite group, and a person of taste and refinement [39]. Public self-consciousness had a stronger positive influence on the value of this social benefit for women than for men.

3.3. Brand Prestige

Brand prestige is the relatively high social status related to a brand [40]. Consumers' perceptions of a brand's prestige derive from interactions with other consumers (e.g., observation, word-of-mouth), attributes of the brand (e.g., price, quality, reputation), and the brand's emotional appeal. Brands with higher prestige create greater appeal because of their relative scarcity and higher price compared with less prestigious brands. Some consumers purchase expensive brands to enhance their self-image and social status. Through a process of meaning transfer, prestige attached to a brand may be transferred to a wearer. The ways in which prestigious brands differ from non-prestigious brands can affect consumers who are considering purchasing a brand as a means to enhance their social status and self-expression. In turn, the prestige of a brand leads to brand loyalty [41].

3.4. Self-Expressive Brand

A brand is self-expressive if it is perceived by a consumer to signify the inner self and enhance the social self [42]. Consumers choose self-expressive brands as symbols of personal characteristics. As such, a self-expressive brand increases the strength of a consumer's connection to a brand and provides social benefits by influencing others' perceptions of the wearer. For example, Assimos et al. [43] examined the relationship between status consumption, self-expression, conspicuous consumption, and social consumption through an online survey. Their results revealed a strong relationship between status consumption and (a) self-expression, (b) conspicuous consumption, and (c) social consumption.

3.5. Fashion Leadership

Product life cycle is the movement of an item through four stages: introduction, growth, maturity and decline [44]. Fashion leadership refers to consumers who purchase a new fashion item during the introductory stage of a fashion life cycle. Rosing et al. [45] described an ambidextrous leader as one with the ability to encourage two types of behaviors in followers: explorative (i.e., creative, adaptable, risk taking, flexible, and searching) and exploitative (i.e., using something to gain a benefit). One outcome of ambidexterity is innovation creation; that is, "the sequence of activities by which a new element is introduced into a social unit" [46]. An ambidextrous individual can pursue innovation (adopting new products) while also continuing to use proven products.

Fashion leaders display characteristics of ambidextrous individuals, for example, they are creative [47], actively search for information [36,37], are the first consumers to introduce a fashion innovation into their social unit, encourage exploratory behavior in followers by sharing information about the innovation, and demonstrate strategies that followers can use to cope with conflicting motivations (e.g., face consciousness, public self-consciousness) between adopting something new (with its potential benefits) and maintaining the status quo (with tried and true benefits).

4. Hypotheses Development

4.1. Face Consciousness and Brand Prestige

Face consciousness is an important determinant of consumer behavior for individuals who want to present a favorable image to others by visible consumption of fashion products. Zhang and Wang [48] examined how face affected Chinese consumers' conspicuous luxury brand consumption, and found that other people's opinions and evaluations as well as the desire to gain face and fear of losing face influenced luxury purchasing. Zhang [49] found that both the desire to gain face and the fear of losing face significantly affected the purchase of luxury brands by Chinese consumers. Prestigious brands have intangible benefits and added value for buyers via vicarious association with the brands' status during visible consumption. The prestige value of a brand allows individuals to express their relative position in a social context, and to display their prestige, wealth, and status [50]. Within all cultures, dress is a commonly used means of displaying prestige, status, and success. Consumers high in face consciousness appreciate the intangible benefits of prestige brands.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Consumers with higher (vs. lower) face consciousness will rate their favorite fashion brand higher on brand prestige.*

4.2. Face Consciousness and Self-Expressive Brands

According to Hanzaee and Taghipourian [51], consumers are particularly interested in prestige brands which relate to their self-concept (i.e., express their inner or social self). Consumers' face consciousness guided their consumption in social settings [52]. Huang, et al. [52], hypothesized that desire to gain face, and fear of losing face, affected consumers' perceptions of self-brand congruence for

their favorite restaurant. Results showed that when the ideal-self was considered attainable, the desire to gain face was stimulated while the fear of losing face was diminished.

Face reflects favorable social self-esteem and the goal to be respected [18]. Self-esteem is an inner confidence in one's own merit as an individual person, therefore it is likely that consumers high in face consciousness would appreciate the benefits of inner self-expressive brands. A self-expressive brand also provides social benefits by shaping perceptions of the wearer. Face consciousness is crucial in social situations, so consumers high in face consciousness would appreciate the social benefits of social self-expressive brands.

Hypothesis 2ab (H2ab): *Consumers with higher (vs. lower) face consciousness will rate their favorite fashion brand higher on inner self-expressive brand ability and social self-expressive brand ability.*

4.3. Face Consciousness and Fashion Leadership

Consumers high in face consciousness have a strong need to be socially appropriate [48,53]. There is uncertainty about the social appropriateness of fashions in the introductory stage of the fashion life cycle; the social appropriateness becomes clear as a fashion proceeds through the stages of its life cycle. Consumers with high face consciousness can minimize the uncertainty by delaying purchase until a later stage, perhaps the growth or even maturity stage. Wang et al. [54] discovered that face consciousness was related to fashion consumption in contrasting ways, that is, desire to gain face was positively related to fashion consumption but fear of losing face had a negative relationship to fashion consumption. Consumers high in face consciousness seem unlikely to be fashion leaders (to adopt a new fashion in the introductory stage). New fashions are likely to be too innovative and short-term—attributes that would not appeal to consumers high in face consciousness. It seems more likely these consumers will wait until a fashion is widely accepted (growth or maturity stage), but they would also avoid being among those who adopt during the final stage. Timelessness is one of the core pillars of luxury goods [39]; an attribute that also applies to prestige brands and high-quality goods. Therefore, it seems likely that consumers high in face consciousness would prefer proven, rather than novel, fashions.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *Consumers with higher (vs. lower) face consciousness will score lower on fashion leadership.*

4.4. Public Self-Consciousness and Brand Prestige

Prestige fashion products have attributes such as a brand label that denotes high quality and status [41]. As one strategy to enhance their public images, individuals who have higher public self-consciousness may prefer to purchase prestige brand products. However, individuals high in public self-consciousness may be more concerned with presenting themselves in a way that conforms to social standards in order to gain others' approval. Subsequently, individuals high in public self-consciousness may prefer to ignore the prestige of a brand and focus on the image of the fashion product itself to conform to social standards.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): *Consumers with higher (vs. lower) public self-consciousness will rate their favorite fashion brand higher in brand prestige.*

4.5. Public Self-Consciousness and Self-Expressive Brands

Public self-consciousness denotes attentiveness to the self as viewed by others, therefore those high in public self-consciousness seem more likely to choose brands expressive of the social self and not the inner self. Brands that are expressive of their inner self-awareness would not be as important as

those that represent the social self. Social self-expressive brands portray an individual's social status, social positions, and connections with others within a social context [55]. Thus, it seems likely that those with high (versus low) public self-consciousness will choose social self-expressive brands but not inner self-expressive brands.

Hypothesis 5ab (H5ab): *Consumers with higher (vs. lower) public self-consciousness will rate their favorite fashion brand higher in social self-expression but will not differ in their ratings of how much their favorite brand expresses their inner self.*

4.6. Public Self-Consciousness and Fashion Leadership

Some previous studies [38,56] found that fashion leaders scored higher on public self-consciousness than fashion followers; that is, the earliest adopters were more focused on aspects of the self that are observable and can be evaluated by others. McNeill [57] found that fashion innovativeness and self-concept were correlated, suggesting that higher fashion innovativeness was likely to be related to strong self-consciousness. In the Workman and Lee [36,37] study, an analysis of 25 years of research on fashion adopter propensity revealed that fashion leaders tend to have higher self-confidence and public self-consciousness compared to non-leaders.

Hypothesis 6 (H6): *Consumers with higher (vs. lower) public self-consciousness will score higher on fashion leadership.*

5. Research Method

5.1. Procedure

This study was approved by the Southern Illinois University's Institutional Review Board and conducted in accordance with ethical standards, including participants' informed consent. Following an announcement in class, paper-and-pencil questionnaires were distributed and collected from students who volunteered to participate in the study. Participants were enrolled in large classes at a mid-western university in the U.S. Participants were chosen, not only for convenience, but also because companies targeting this segment need to understand their shopping attitudes in order to develop long-term, dependable relationships [58,59]. Comprising about 9.3% of the U.S. population [60], college student consumers are a significant market segment who are developing spending habits that will influence their consumer behavior for the rest of their lives. In fall 2019, 13.9 million students were expected to enroll at 4-year institutions [61] and these students, who have about USD 417 billion in spending power [62], were expected to spend USD 54.5 billion for school supplies [63]. In addition to spending on necessities, these students have USD 27 billion in annual discretionary income, of which USD 5 billion is spent on clothing and shoes and USD 4 billion on personal care items. Therefore, college students are an important group for examining variables that influence consumer behavior such as face consciousness, public self-consciousness, brand prestige, inner and social self-expressive brand and fashion leadership.

5.2. Materials

The questionnaire contained demographic items and scales for face consciousness, public self-consciousness, brand prestige, inner and social self-expressive brand and fashion leadership.

Face consciousness was measured with a 4-item scale designed by Bao, Zhou, and Su [10] and based on Tse's [64] framework (e.g., "It is important that others like the products and brands I buy"). A 7-point scale accompanied each item (1 = strongly agree; 7 = strongly disagree); higher scores indicated greater face consciousness in consumption. Responses were summed to create a score on

face consciousness (possible range of 4 to 28). Face refers to a sense of favorable social self-worth that a person wants others to have of her or him in a social context [18,65]. The face consciousness scale was chosen because it measures the influence of face on consumer behavior, it has reliability and content validity, and has been used by other researchers (e.g., recent research includes [6,22,23]).

Public self-consciousness was measured with Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss's [8] 7-item scale (e.g., "I'm usually aware of my appearance"). The scale measures a propensity to pay attention to aspects of the self that others can observe and evaluate. A 7-point scale accompanied each item (1 = strongly agree; 7 = strongly disagree); higher scores indicated greater public self-consciousness. Responses were summed to create a score on public self-consciousness (possible range of 7 to 49). The measure is reliable, has content validity, and has been extensively used (e.g., recent research includes [11,12,39]).

Brand prestige was measured with Hanzaee and Taghipourian's [51] 3-item scale (e.g., "This is a very prestigious brand"). Brand prestige relates to the social status of a brand and it's comparatively elevated ranking [40]. A 7-point scale accompanied each item (1 = strongly agree; 7 = strongly disagree); higher scores indicated that participants assigned greater brand prestige to their favorite brand. Responses were summed to create a score on brand prestige (possible range of 3 to 21). Hanzaee and Taghipourian's self-report measure was chosen because it is reliable, has content validity, and has been used in recent research (e.g., [66]).

Self-expressive brand ability was measured with Carroll and Ahuvia's [42] 8-item scale (e.g., 4 items—inner self "This brand reflects my personality"; 4 items—social self "This brand contributes to my image"). A 7-point scale accompanied each item (1 = strongly agree; 7 = strongly disagree); higher scores indicated that participants assigned greater self-expressive ability to their favorite brand. Responses were summed to create a score on inner self-expressive brand ability (possible range of 4 to 28) and a score on social self-expressive brand ability (possible score of 4 to 28). According to Carroll and Ahuvia [42], a brand's self-expressive power is determined by perceptions of how well a specific brand reveals a consumer's inner self and augments his or her social self. Carroll and Ahuvia's self-report measure was chosen because it is reliable, has content validity, and has been frequently used in research (e.g., recent research includes [67–69]).

Fashion leadership was measured with Hirschman and Adcock's [70] 6-item fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership scale (e.g., "How often do you influence the types of clothing fashion your friends buy?"). Each item was accompanied by response categories of Often (4), Sometimes (3), Seldom (2), Never (1), Don't know (0). Responses were summed to create a score on fashion leadership (possible range of 0 to 24). Hirschman and Adcock's self-report measure was chosen because it is reliable, has content validity, and has been frequently used in research (recent research includes [2,71,72]).

5.3. Procedure and Analysis

Each participant listed their favorite fashion brand and then indicated their degree of agreement with each item in the questionnaire in regard to the brand they listed. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha reliability, and multivariate/univariate analysis of variance (M/ANOVA) were conducted to analyze data.

6. Results

Participants were 221 students (138 women, 81 men, 2 missing data) from 50 majors with a mean age of 21.31 (range 18 to 51); 199 were single, 12 married, and 10 otherwise classified. Class status included 34 freshmen, 50 sophomores, 50 juniors, 57 seniors, 22 graduate students, and 8 otherwise classified. Ethnicity included 120 Caucasians, 74 African Americans, 13 Hispanic/Latinos, 6 Asian/Asian Americans, and 8 otherwise classified.

Descriptive statistics for scales used in the study can be found in Table 1. Scale reliability ranged from 0.78 to 0.92. Cronbach's alpha values of 0.7 or higher indicate acceptable internal consistency.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values indicate sampling adequacy: values less than 0.60 are considered not adequate; values between 0.70 and 0.80 are good; values of 0.80 or higher are excellent.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and reliability for variables used in study.

Scale	Mean	SD	Range	Reliability	KMO
Face consciousness (4 items)	15.39	6.63	4–28	0.89	0.79
Public self-consciousness (7 Items)	32.63	8.39	7–49	0.78	0.74
Brand prestige (3 items)	15.01	4.66	3–21	0.88	0.70
Inner self-expressive brand ability (4 items)	19.41	6.03	4–28	0.92	0.76
Social self-expressive brand ability (4 items)	18.99	6.03	4–28	0.89	0.80
Fashion leadership (6 items)	15.86	5.54	0–24	0.88	0.85

M/ANOVA was used to test hypotheses with face consciousness (high, low based on median split) and public self-consciousness (high, low based on median split) as independent variables, and dependent variables of brand prestige, inner self-expressive brand ability, social self-expressive brand ability, and fashion leadership. M/ANOVA results revealed that face consciousness $[F (4, 203) = 4.48, p < 0.002]$ and public self-consciousness $[F (4, 203) = 2.92, p < 0.022]$ were significant for the dependent variables. There was no significant interaction between face consciousness and public self-consciousness on the dependent variables $[F (4, 203) = 1.19, p < 0.314]$

ANOVA showed that face consciousness was significant for brand prestige, inner self-expressive brand ability, and social self-expressive brand ability, but not significant for fashion leadership (see Table 2). H1, H2a, and H2b were supported. Consumers with higher (vs. lower) face consciousness scored higher on brand prestige, inner self-expressive brand ability, and social self-expressive brand ability. H3 was not supported. Consumers with higher (vs. lower) face consciousness did not differ in fashion leadership.

Table 2. ANOVA results for dependent variables by face consciousness and public self-consciousness.

Scale		Mean Square	F	p<
Brand prestige				
Face consciousness		118.61	5.50	0.02
High	M = 15.78 (SD = 4.18)			
Low	M = 14.26 (SD = 5.13)			
Public self-consciousness		1.19	0.06	0.82
High	M = 14.58 (SD = 4.87)			
Low	M = 13.76 (SD = 5.54)			
Inner self-expressive				
Face consciousness		233.35	6.80	0.01
High	M = 20.46 (SD = 5.22)			
Low	M = 18.20 (SD = 6.47)			
Public self-consciousness		17.20	0.50	0.48
High	M = 18.66 (SD = 5.80)			
Low	M = 17.92 (SD = 6.89)			
Social self-expressive				
Face consciousness		457.13	14.49	0.000
High	M = 20.63 (SD = 5.58)			
Low	M = 17.27 (SD = 5.77)			
Public self-consciousness		177.91	5.64	0.02
High	M = 18.68 (SD = 5.08)			
Low	M = 16.37 (SD = 6.03)			
Fashion leadership				
Face consciousness		6.71	0.22	0.64
High	M = 15.79 (SD = 5.10)			
Low	M = 15.78 (SD = 6.03)			
Public self-consciousness		170.43	5.65	0.02
High	M = 17.45 (SD = 5.38)			
Low	M = 14.73 (SD = 6.22)			

Note: Face consciousness high (n = 112); low (n = 98). Public self-consciousness high (n = 109); low (n = 101). M, mean; SD, standard deviation; F, the relationship of two mean square values.

ANOVA results revealed that public self-consciousness was significant for social self-expressive brand ability and fashion leadership but was not significant for brand prestige or inner self-expressive brand ability (see Table 2). H4 was not supported. Consumers with higher (vs. lower) public self-consciousness did not differ in strength of response to brand prestige. H5a, H5b, and H6 were supported. Consumers with higher (vs. lower) public self-consciousness differed in strength of response to social self-expressive brand ability and fashion leadership but did not differ in strength of response to inner self-expressive brand ability.

7. Discussion and Implications

7.1. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to investigate the relationships among face consciousness, public self-consciousness, brand prestige, self-expressive brand ability (inner, social), and fashion leadership. Internal motives such as face consciousness and public self-consciousness undeniably influence consumer decision-making.

Results provide insight into how consumer decisions are affected by face consciousness and public self-consciousness. Degree of face consciousness and degree of public self-consciousness affected consumers' responses to a brand's prestige, the self-expressive potential of a brand, and fashion leadership. In summary, the results showed that face consciousness and public self-consciousness similarly affected ratings of social self-expressive brand ability. However, face consciousness, but not public self-consciousness, influenced ratings of both brand prestige and inner self-expressive brand ability. Finally, public self-consciousness, but not face consciousness, influenced fashion leadership. Thus, while face consciousness and public self-consciousness both are concerned with consciousness, they independently influence consumer behavior in different ways. There was no significant interaction between face consciousness and public self-consciousness on any of the dependent variables.

Hypothesis 1: *Consumers with higher (vs. lower) face consciousness will rate their favorite fashion brand higher on brand prestige. Consumers with higher (vs. lower) face consciousness did rate their favorite fashion brand higher on brand prestige These results are consistent with Li, Zhang, and Sun [73], who proposed that face consciousness prompts a concern for social value, which subsequently leads to the purchase of conspicuous products as a means to present social prestige and an ideal social image. Purchasing and displaying visible products (e.g., brand names with elevated prestige) is one way to convey prestige, social status, and face.*

Hypothesis 2ab: *Consumers with higher (vs. lower) face consciousness will rate their favorite fashion brand higher on inner self-expressive brand ability and social self-expressive brand ability. Consistent with Ting-Toomey and Kurogi [18], who asserted that self-esteem reflects an inner confidence in one's own worth, consumers high (vs. low) in face consciousness rated their favorite fashion brand higher on the ability to express their inner self. Likewise, those higher (vs. lower) in face consciousness rated their favorite fashion brand higher on the ability to express their social self. Face consciousness is heightened in social situations, therefore the ability of their favorite brand to express their social self is important.*

Hypothesis 3: *Consumers with higher (vs. lower) face consciousness will score lower on fashion leadership. Participants who were high and low in face consciousness both scored near the mean on the scale used to measure fashion leadership. Purchasing a new fashion style can be risky. Being the first to wear a new style carries the social risk of "losing face" if the style is not widely accepted. It is safer to wait until a style is firmly established to adopt. As mentioned in the review of literature, consumers high in face consciousness seem unlikely to adopt a new fashion in the introductory stage because new fashions are too innovative and short-term—attributes that make new fashions a risky choice. But apparently any amount of face consciousness dampens consumers' acceptance of new fashions.*

Hypothesis 4: *Consumers with higher (vs. lower) public self-consciousness will rate their favorite fashion brand higher in brand prestige. Contrary to the hypothesis, participants high versus low in public self-consciousness did not differ in their ratings of their favorite fashion brand's prestige. A brand's prestige is relative; that is, determined as high compared to other brands [40], therefore consumers who purchase prestigious brands may do so to enhance their social status and self-expression rather than because of their situational appropriateness. Perhaps the prestige of a fashion brand is unrelated to the assessment of situational appropriateness.*

Hypothesis 5ab: *Consumers with higher (vs. lower) public self-consciousness will rate their favorite fashion brand higher in social self-expression but will not differ in their ratings of how much their favorite brand expresses their inner self. Consumers who are high in public self-consciousness are motivated to compare with others as a way to assess their situational appropriateness. Consistent with Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss's [8] theory, participants high (vs. low) in public self-consciousness were more aware of the self as it is viewed by others. This self-awareness was reflected in the finding that those high in public self-consciousness gave higher ratings to the ability of their favorite brand to reflect the social self. Consistent with the hypothesis, participants high versus low in public self-consciousness did not differ in their ratings of the ability of their favorite brand to express the inner self.*

Hypothesis 6: *Consumers with higher (vs. lower) public self-consciousness will score higher on fashion leadership. Participants high (vs. low) in public self-consciousness did score higher on fashion leadership. This result is consistent with [36–38,57,58], who found that fashion leaders were higher in public self-consciousness than fashion followers.*

7.2. Theoretical Implications

Social comparison theory was used to help explain the effects of public self-consciousness and face consciousness on consumer variables such as brand prestige, inner and social self-expressive brand ability, and fashion leadership. The internal motivation underlying a social comparison will no doubt influence responses to consumer variables. For example, consumers with high face consciousness are motivated to compare with others as a means to evaluate their relative prestige and social status. On the other hand, consumers with high public self-consciousness engage in social comparisons to assess the situational appropriateness of their appearance. According to social comparison theory [9] individuals look for similarities and dissimilarities between others and themselves in order to assess their own appearance, because objective standards are not always available. In particular, comparisons take place under conditions of ambiguity when situational appropriateness is not clear. Ambiguous standards are likely to occur in almost every social situation where people have freedom of choice in what to wear. In the current study, differences in internal motivations (i.e., face consciousness and public self-consciousness) for comparison with others influenced responses to consumer variables. These results may yield insights into the success or failure of fashion products.

Fashion leadership is an important variable in the ambidextrous open innovation process. When fashion leaders adopt an innovation during the introduction stage, the product life cycle begins, and as leaders visibly display and verbally share information, the cycle accelerates. However, if fashion leaders reject an innovation, the innovation is sent back to the designers to either start over or to more fully develop the product. Although fashion leaders may not recognize their role in the open innovation process, their role is crucial to the successful introduction of innovative fashions.

7.3. Practical Implications

This study's results provide useful information that companies can use to create appropriate brand management strategies for their target market. For example, companies that specialize in masstige brands can build on the brand's prestige to appeal to individuals who are high in face consciousness. It would not be as important for masstige brand companies to lead the way in introducing new

fashions, because customers who are interested in brand prestige might consider styles that are too fashion-forward to be risky purchases. The possibility of losing face outweighs any benefits gained by being the first to adopt a new fashion. On the other hand, bellwether companies, who specialize in introducing fashion trends, can attract customers who are high in public self-consciousness or who are fashion leaders. Retailers could reach out to customers who purchase fashions during the introductory stage of a fashion's life cycle with special incentives to encourage brand loyalty.

7.4. Further Research and Limitations

This research has limitations related to the sample. Firstly, the sample included only college students. To address this limitation, it would be prudent to include a range of ages in order to evaluate the generalizability of the results in this study.

Secondly, this study examined a limited number of variables, namely, brand prestige, social and inner self-expressive brand ability, and fashion leadership. Studying other consumer variables would contribute to an understanding of the effect of face consciousness and public self-consciousness on consumer behavior. Expanding the scope of the study to include private self-consciousness as a variable would add to the explanatory power for explaining consumer behavior.

Thirdly, this study examined face consciousness as a uni-dimensional variable using a scale designed by Bao, Zhou, and Su [10] and based on Tse's [65] framework. However, some studies pointed out that face consciousness is a multi-dimensional construct (e.g., [48]). For example, Huang et al. [52] measured two dimensions of face consciousness for their study: desire to gain face and to avoid loss of face. Jiang [20] examined face consciousness as a variable with three dimensions; that is, to enhance, maintain or save face. For further study, face might be treated as a multidimensional construct that may influence consumers' decision making. Consumers in collective (vs. individualist) cultures are more concerned about how others view them, making it important to examine face consciousness and responses to brand variables within and across cultural contexts.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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